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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS NGO ALLEGES JAM TORTURE IN HOSPITAL,
REPORTS INCREASED SUNNI MILITIA ACTIVITY

Classified By: DEPUTY POLCOUNS ROBERT GILCHRIST FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND
(d)

11. (C) Summary. Ahmed al-Azzawi, board member of Iraq-based NGO "National Commission for Defending Human Rights" told EmbOffs November 21 that he was discouraged about escalating violence in Iraq and doubted the future would bring much improvement in the near to mid-term. He highlighted the most serious reports that his NGO had recently received, including allegations that the basement of Sadr City's Imam Ali hospital was being used to torture Sunni Arabs and reports of renewed efforts to force out remaining Shia from Baghdad's Mansour neighborhood. He explained that the Sunni Jaysh al Omar militia was gaining prominence in Baghdad Sunni neighborhoods, a direct reaction to the attacks of Shia militias. End Summary.

RECENT REPORTS: TORTURE AND DISPLACEMENT

12. (C) National Commission for Defending Human Rights board member Ahmed Al-Azzawi told EmbOffs November 21 that his NGO had received several allegations from doctors working at the hospital that Sadr City's Imam Ali hospital's basement was being used by JAM as a torture cell. He said reports of other hospitals either infiltrated by JAM or serving this same purpose was not uncommon, but that this was the only hospital for which he considered the reports to be credible.

13. (C) Al-Azzawi also advised that his organization had receiving an upsurge in reports of forced Shia displacement in Baghdad's Mansour neighborhood - an escalation of the already high displacement trend since February 22. Though Mansour district has both Sunni and Shia enclaves, it is generally thought of as a Sunni district. Al-Azzawi explained that Mansour Shia residents were reportedly receiving letters threatening death if residents did not relocate within a specific period of time. Al-Azzawi was not able to provide more specifics such as numbers of residents affected.

POLARIZATION AND INCREASED SECTARIAN MILITIAS?

14. (C) Al-Azzawi told EmbOffs that militia activity by both Sunni and Shia had escalated over recent months. He claimed JAM elements were growing stronger and often ventured into Sunni neighborhoods to abduct or attack Sunni residents. As a reaction, the Sunni Jaysh al-Omar militia was gaining resonance with residents in the Sunni neighborhoods of Khadra, Dora, and Ghazaliya who saw no other solution to protect themselves. Al-Azzawi, a Sunni resident of Dora, said many residents feared the rogue Sunni militia, but

feared Shia militias even more.

15. (C) Al-Azzawi reported that among Sunni residents in Dora, it was somewhat general knowledge that the Jaysh al Omar employed various working cells, some designated to protect the Sunni neighborhoods and others focused on conducting offensive operations against Shia. Al-Azzawi lamented the sectarian polarization that was rampant across all sectors of Iraq society ranging from politics to militias to everyday residential life.

COMMENT

16. (C) The National Commission for Defending Human Rights, headed by Kurdish Christian Azad Al Amadi, is one of the few human rights NGOs in Iraq that monitor abuses against all ethnic and religious groups. Although its operation can be described as "unfocused", often working on issues on an ad-hoc basis, the organization claims to have developed a nationwide network of some 2,000 volunteers and members. The information Al-Azzawi provided regarding JAM- perpetrated torture tracks with multiple other reports, although this was the first allegation we have heard regarding torture in a hospital. Post will attempt to verify the report, potentially through a direct contact with staff from the hospital at a meeting organized by the NGO.
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